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# SECONDARY SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT COUNCILS: ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

Massachusetts Department of Education  
Community Education Office

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**Developed by  
Community Education Office**

**Susan Freedman  
Coordinator of Community Education**

**Ross Zerchykov  
Community Education Specialist**

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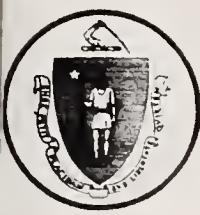
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1385 Hancock Street  
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1385 Hancock Street, Quincy, Massachusetts 02169

Summer, 1987

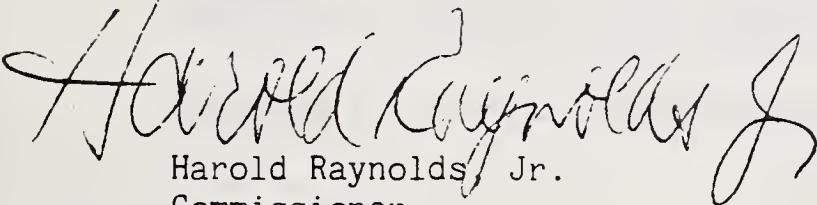
Dear Colleagues:

School Improvement Councils have been creative and effective in bringing school staff, parents, students, and community people together to improve their local schools. As you know, students and teachers are benefitting from the exciting and enriching new programs, materials, and opportunities that School Improvement Fund grants are making possible.

Secondary schools, because of their size, the age and diversity of their student body, and their departmental organization, present special challenges to school improvement councils. These councils are often faced with issues of equity, stimulating parent and community participation, and soliciting student interest in the decision making and projects of the council. Councils are converting these challenges to unique opportunities through which they are raising school morale, expanding student services, and responding to teachers' needs.

We hope that this book, based on the experiences of many secondary schools, is helpful as you work with your council and your school community to address the educational priorities of your school. Good luck and continued success as you contribute important time and energy to enhancing the programs and services that schools across the state are offering to our students.

Best regards,

  
Harold Raynolds Jr.  
Commissioner



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This booklet would not have been possible without the insights and suggestions that were shared by participants at a statewide conference on secondary School Improvement Councils held at the Central Massachusetts Regional Education Center on February 26, 1987. This conference, co-sponsored by the Department of Education, the Massachusetts Association of Secondary School Administrators, and the Massachusetts Teachers Association, brought together teams of school administrators, department heads, teacher union representatives, and teacher, student, parent and community School Improvement Council members from nine communities across Massachusetts. (For a list of participants see Appendix C). Meeting in an intensive working session, one-hundred conference attendees brainstormed about council issues and provided the suggestions about "what works" that are contained in this booklet.

Further suggestions and examples of "what works" have been provided by over 150 principals and School Improvement Council members who have graciously and patiently responded to our ongoing phone interview surveys. These individuals have shared with us the fruits of their experience and have provided a valuable perspective on the factors that contribute to council effectiveness.

We would like to give a special "thank you" to members of our panel of field-reviewers, whose names are listed in Appendix D. These individuals, school administrators, principals, teachers, parents, and student members of secondary School Improvement Councils, took time out of a very busy time in the school year to review a draft of this booklet and provide many useful suggestions.

In a very real sense, therefore, the true authors of this booklet are the administrators, teachers, parents, students and community members on secondary School Improvement Councils across the Commonwealth whose hard work and dedication are making these councils into a potent force for school improvement.



## INTRODUCTION

School Improvement Councils in Massachusetts were created through the passage of the Public School Improvement Act, Chapter 188 of the Acts of 1985, as amended by Chapter 414 of the Acts of 1986. This comprehensive state legislation is the first education reform bill in over a decade and is designed to stimulate educational improvement across the Commonwealth. Among its many provisions, the statute contains five formula and nine discretionary grant programs which provide incentives for schools to upgrade materials, programs, services, and staff training. School Improvement Councils are established by schools that want to take advantage of the School Improvement Fund, one of the five formula grant programs. The purpose of these School Improvement Councils is to increase citizen, parent, teacher, and, at the secondary level, student participation in school improvement efforts.

While elementary schools now enjoy their second year of experience with School Improvement Councils, secondary schools became eligible to receive grants from the School Improvement Fund during the 1986-87 school year. Recognizing that the secondary school environment provides unique challenges and opportunities for School Improvement Councils, the Department of Education joined forces with the State Community Education Advisory Council, the Massachusetts Association of Secondary School Administrators, and the Massachusetts Teachers Association to convene a one day working conference on secondary School Improvement Councils. Participants at this conference, which was attended by more than 100 administrators and teacher, student, parent and community members of School Improvement Councils from nine communities throughout Massachusetts, helped to identify the special situations which challenge secondary School Improvement Councils and the strategies which can address those challenges. (See Appendix C for a list of communities and participants.)

This booklet, part of the Department's ongoing effort to help local School Improvement Councils by providing them with information and examples on "what works," is a direct outgrowth of this conference. Conference attendees shared with each other their insights on the factors that contribute to council effectiveness and their vision of the potential of School Improvement Councils. In addition, they, and many other members of School Improvement Councils who have responded to our surveys and phone interviews, shared creative and practical suggestions for increasing the impact of councils at the secondary school level.

This booklet extends this sharing by describing strategies and practices that have enabled secondary School Improvement Councils to:

- Represent the diverse constituencies at the secondary school (Section II: Council Formation and Election)
- Involve these constituencies in the school improvement process (Section III: Outreach)
- Develop into a working team (Section IV: Decision-Making)

- Coordinate their decisions with systemwide school improvement priorities while addressing the unique needs of their school (Section VI: School Improvement Councils and School Committees)

We hope that secondary School Improvement Councils will find this booklet helpful as they collaborate with their school community to expand educational opportunities and experiences in their schools.

For further information on, or for questions about, School Improvement Councils, please contact either the Regional Education Center school improvement contact people listed on the back cover of this booklet or write or call:

Susan Freedman  
Coordinator of Community Education  
Massachusetts Department of Education  
1385 Hancock Street  
Quincy, MA 02169  
(617) 770-7581

## I. PURPOSE

### What are School Improvement Councils?

School Improvement Councils are decision-making committees, composed of principals, teachers, parents, community representatives, and, at the secondary level, students, that are voluntarily established by schools in order to be eligible for School Improvement Fund grants.

### What is the School Improvement Fund and what is its relationship to School Improvement Councils?

The School Improvement Fund has been established by the Massachusetts Legislature as an incentive to schools to establish School Improvement Councils. Each school that forms a council receives a grant equal to the number of full-time equivalent students enrolled in the previous year multiplied by \$10.00. School Improvement Councils are encouraged to involve the school community in assessing the needs of the school and in determining the uses of the grant that will contribute most significantly to school improvement.

### Who serves on School Improvement Councils?

The Legislation specifies that School Imrpovement Councils are to be composed of the following representatives of the school and the community:

- School Principal, who is designated as the chairperson
- Three teachers, elected annually by the teachers in the school
- Three parents of children in the school, elected annually by the parents at the school
- One community representative, who is not a parent of a child in the school, appointed by the school committee
- Two students, one male and one female, in schools with any of grades 9-12, elected by the students in said grades

For schools with more than 2500 students, an additional teacher, parent, and student will be elected to serve on the council for each additional 500 students.

## **What are the responsibilities of School Improvement Councils?**

Councils have the authority, subject to the veto of the school committee, to determine how the School Improvement Fund grant allocated to their school shall be spent, consistent with the statute which provides great latitude on the kinds of expenditures that can be made. Specifically, Section 51 of Chapter 15, of the General Laws, as amended by Chapter 414 of the Acts of 1986, states that the grant may be used for:

- Innovative academic programs
- Expanded services to students
- Purchase of instructional equipment
- Alternative educational programs
- Cultural education programs
- Community and parental involvement programs
- Business and education partnership programs
- Staff training
- Or any other purposes consistent with the intent of the legislation

The grant, however, may not be used for:

- Current operating expenses
- Supplies
- Utilities
- Existing building and equipment maintenance
- Existing staff salaries and wages
- Or to supplant current operating costs

## II. COUNCIL FORMATION AND ELECTIONS

How are the teacher, parent, student and community representatives to be elected or appointed?

The law states that teacher, parent, and student members of the Council are to be elected annually by their peers.

Teachers can elect their representatives at one of their regular meetings or at a special meeting convened for the purpose of selecting their representatives to the councils. At those schools that hold an annual meeting at which liaison people for the year are determined, the staff may choose to elect their council representatives as part of the liaison process.

Parents can be elected at the same time that the local parent-teacher organization holds its annual election. Any organization that is representative of the entire school body can be designated as the group that coordinates the Council election. All parents, whether or not they are members of the organization, can run for the council position. In schools at which there is no parent teacher organization, the school committee is to appoint three parents in that school. The school committee may ask the principal for the names of potential parent representatives.

Students in schools with any of the grades 9-12 may elect one male and one female student to the council through their student government elections or any other process.

The Community Representative, an individual who is not a parent of a child at the school, is to be appointed by the school committee. In some communities, the school committee has used its own knowledge of citizens to appoint a community representative. In other communities, the school committee appoints the community representatives for each school council from a slate of nominees presented by the superintendent, the principal, town meeting members, or any other group that the committee may ask to assist with this process.

The law also specifies that, to the extent possible, councils should be broadly representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of the school building and of the community. In order to assure diverse representation on the council, parent-teacher organizations that organize council elections have recruited candidates from under-represented groups. In cases where there is no parent teacher organization to organize council elections, the school committee has a direct opportunity to appoint a representative slate of parent members. The appointment of a community representative provides a similar opportunity to improve the racial-ethnic representativeness of the council.

**If a secondary school has a diverse faculty, how can the election process ensure that this diversity is represented on the council?**

The faculty at secondary schools consists of teachers of academic subjects, pupil services personnel, and co-curricular and extra-curricular staff. Secondary schools can use a variety of ways to ensure that school staff are equitably represented on the council. Here are two examples:

- Have the academic teachers, the co-and extra-curricular teachers, and the pupil services staff each meet separately as nominating caucuses to select one of their peers as a candidate for the School Improvement Council.
- Stipulate that there can be only one teacher on the council from any single academic department.

**How can the variety of student perspectives be represented on a council?**

Many secondary schools have several special student interest groups at the school: student government, clubs of various kinds, sport teams, music groups, etc. These groups, because they represent the spectrum of students' interests, can be asked to nominate candidates for the student representatives on the council.

**How can the election process ensure that parents are adequately represented on the council?**

Some secondary schools, whether or not they have a parent-teacher organization, find it difficult to interest parents in participating on committees and councils. Electing parents to the School Improvement Council can be a special challenge when there is no existing schoolwide parent teacher organization. In such cases, secondary schools have adopted a variety of creative ways of not just electing a representative group of parents, but also stimulating greater parental involvement. These strategies include:

- Using existing parents' groups, e.g., Chapter I and Bilingual Parents Advisory Committees and sports and booster clubs, to nominate candidates from among their members and coordinate a run-off election from among these candidates.
- Holding elections at the conclusion or beginning of cultural assembly programs, school plays, open-house nights, or other educational or social events that bring parents into the school.
- Holding "at-large" elections from among the parent body by soliciting nominations through direct mail and school and community newspapers. Parents can be asked to nominate themselves or others for membership on the Council. In some schools, this approach has been so successful in generating volunteers that a mail ballot run-off election has been necessary as there were more volunteers than seats on the councils.

- Inviting all parents to a evening informational meeting at which the School Improvement Council is explained and parent council members are elected.
- Holding a school committee sponsored forum, possibly with a respected guest-speaker, on an issue of current concern to parents of secondary school students. Parent members can be elected at the conclusion of the forum.
- Convening the School Improvement Council as a subcommittee of an existing school group, such as a School Advisory Council or a goal-setting panel, whose members were chosen through a representative process similar to that required by the council legislation.

#### **How have the non-parent community representatives on the council been chosen?**

Because community representatives are not parents at the school, they can bring a broader perspective to the work of the council. In choosing the community representative, school committees have had the following goals in mind:

- Provide a better racial and ethnic balance to the School Improvement Council.
- Provide neighborhood balance, if the three parent members of the Council come from the same or similar neighborhoods.
- Reward and recognize prior contributions to the school.
- Provide access to community opinion leaders. School Councils have drawn their appointments from a range of community leaders:
  - Prominent civic activists
  - Town meeting delegates
  - City or town finance committee members
  - Senior citizens
  - Representatives of local colleges and other community or cultural institutions
  - Business leaders

#### **What is the special role of the community representative?**

Community representatives help to bring a broader community orientation to the council. While community representatives may be parents at another school in the system, at the school on whose council they serve they represent all citizens who have a stake in the school system.

Community representatives may also have areas of special interest, expertise, and contacts that can help the School Improvement Council to be more effective and creative in its approach to school improvement. As a result, community representatives can help councils by acting as:

- Resource linkers who establish contacts with community service organizations, other service agencies, and business groups
- Liaison to the school committee which appointed them
- Specialists in technical areas of expertise
- Contacts to civic organizations and the larger non-parent community

### **III. COUNCILS' RESPONSIBILITIES: REPRESENTATION AND OUTREACH**

#### **Why were School Improvement Councils included in Chapter 188?**

This legislation was designed to increase the involvement of key stakeholders - principals, teachers, parents, students and citizens - in the educational planning that occurs in schools. Through the incentive of the school improvement grant, schools are encouraged to include local citizens in their schools' decision-making. In the two years in which School Improvement Councils have been operating in Massachusetts, they have done a great deal to expand community understanding of, and involvement in, the schools.

#### **What steps can School Improvement Councils take to most effectively represent the many different groups and interests that coexist at the secondary school?**

Secondary schools serve very diverse populations with differing goals, expectations and needs. Secondary School Improvement Councils have creatively met the challenge of involving the school and the community in their information gathering and decision-making processes in a variety of ways:

##### **Extended Memberships**

Chapter 188 describes the voting membership of School Improvement Councils. It does not limit, however, the number of people who can participate with the council as it undertakes its tasks of ascertaining the strengths and weaknesses of the school, the desires and concerns of parents, and the potential resources in the community.

In several schools, council meetings are sometimes attended by the entire teaching staff or the entire Board of the PTA/PTO. However, only duly elected/appointed members of the council are allowed to vote on funding decisions. In one high school, the School Improvement Council has four students who attend its meetings and represent the four grade levels at the school. The students, however, have only two votes on the council.

##### **Subcommittees with Extended Members**

Subcommittees represent a way of involving more parents, teachers, students, and citizens on issues of particular concern. An extended subcommittee, chaired by a School Improvement Council member, can provide an opportunity for additional people to become involved on a short term, focused basis. This kind of involvement also provides the School Improvement Council with extra energy and "people power." In one high school, student members of the council chaired a extended subcommittee of students which designed and conducted a survey soliciting students' perceptions of school needs.

## School and Community Needs Assessments

Needs assessments are used to determine the gaps that exist between "what is" and "what should be." They give students, teachers, parents, administrators, and others the opportunity to express their feelings about what is positive in the school and what areas need improvement. They also can offer the opportunity to suggest "wish lists" which indicate aspirations and longer range goals toward which the school and the council might want to work.

Secondary school councils have used many different forms of needs assessments ranging from formal, written questionnaires distributed to all of its school community to informal open meetings at the school that generate the concerns and desires of the individuals participating in the discussion. The majority of schools have surveyed their "internal" constituencies, such as students and school staff, and their "external" constituents, including parents, other citizens, and representatives of community organizations and agencies. Councils also have used their schools' test scores, attendance reports, and other measures to identify school needs.

Needs assessments, formal and informal, help councils to identify needs that currently are not being met at the school and provide councils with suggestions for effective uses that could be made of the monies available through the School Improvement Fund.

## Needs Assessments through Surveys

Councils have used several different ways to survey the student population:

- Using homeroom periods to ask students to fill out questionnaires
- Having all English classes fill out surveys on a particular day
- Asking department heads to disseminate surveys during department meetings
- Asking guidance counselors to give the surveys to students during fall meetings

Surveys of parents and community members have been undertaken in order to reach as many individuals as possible who have an interest in the school. These surveys serve two important functions:

- They yield information about perceived needs of the school and about potential resources to meet these needs.
- They signal that the School Improvement Council and the school are sincere in their interest in involving the wider community in their deliberations.

The following kinds of information have come from School Improvement Councils' surveys of the schools' external community:

- Assessments of the school's strengths and weaknesses
- Suggestions of community resources that can address schools' needs and enhance schools' existing programming
- Recommendations for projects/programs that could be funded by the school improvement grant
- Offers to work as volunteers on school improvement projects

### **"Request-For-Programs"**

Many School Improvement Councils, especially in secondary schools, distribute a "request-for-programs" application form that solicits ideas for specific projects that could be funded by the councils' grant. Responses to this solicitation yield an array of project ideas from which the council determines a list of priorities based on its formal and informal needs assessments.

### **Community Hearings**

Many councils hold special meetings to solicit ideas from school staff, students, and community members on spending priorities and specific projects for the council to consider. These hearings, which are held at different stages of the council decision-making process, can provide:

- Opportunities for information sharing and "brainstorming!"
- Opportunities for school constituencies to suggest ways of responding to school needs. Following a needs assessment survey, some councils have invited their parents and school community to a meeting to evaluate and prioritize the survey results.
- Opportunities for the sponsors of project proposals, submitted in response to the council's "request-for-programs," to explain their proposal in detail and describe how it will benefit the school.

### **What strategies yield a higher response rate to community surveys?**

Because each community is different, there is no one sure-fire formula for maximizing response rates to community surveys. Generally, however, schools have found that:

- Direct mail, while expensive, is more effective at the secondary school level than take-home notices.

- Informing students about the potential of School Improvement Councils and the importance of the survey can increase parents' interest in, and rate of response to, the survey.
- Publicity about the purposes and potential of the School Improvement Council serves to increase interest in surveys.
- Publicity and communication strategies that have proven to be effective include:
  - Submitting regular press releases to the local papers and cable TV to keep the community informed about council activities.
  - Providing local papers with summaries of council meetings on a regular basis.
  - Placing prominent notices of council meetings in the local media.
  - Designing and prominently displaying posters that announce council meetings. These posters can be placed at the school, at town or city hall, in town libraries, on community bulletin boards in area stores, etc.

#### IV. DECISION-MAKING

##### Are there guidelines for how councils should operate?

The legislation creating School Improvement Councils specifies very few operational guidelines. Councils are to be chaired by the school principal and are to present requests for expenditures to the school committee. They also are subject to all other areas of state law as it pertains to public bodies:

- The Open Meeting Law
- Conduct of public officials and employees
- Auditing requirements
- Public inspection of records

In all other areas the law leaves councils free to develop whatever operating procedures make the most sense locally.

##### How often should a council meet?

The legislation does not specify how many meetings a council should have or how frequently it should meet. Secondary schools have generally found that it is necessary to have a series of meetings in order to become familiar with the existing resources and programs of the school and to determine its major areas of need.

With respect to the frequency of meetings, councils have adopted one of two general strategies. Some councils meet on a regular monthly schedule either until their spending decisions have been made or throughout the whole school year.

Other councils hold a series of regular meetings at the beginning of the year. Thereafter, they meet on a "as-needed" basis when one of their subcommittees or working groups has completed its research and needs input from the council as a whole before taking the next step. Advocates of this subcommittee approach maintain that it conserves the time and energy of busy people and avoids meeting "for the sake of meeting."

Both approaches have trade-offs, however. Regularly scheduled meetings allow councils to publicize their calendar and decision-making timeline and to raise their visibility with the school community. These councils may benefit from greater parent and citizen attendance at their meetings. Moreover, these meetings can be useful in bringing the council together as a working team. The risk, however, is in discouraging the involvement of parents, teachers, students, and others who fear they do not have the necessary time to give to the council.

## **How can the council develop into an effective team?**

Team building is especially important at the secondary school level as the council, like the school, is apt to have members whose perspectives and experience are broadly diverse. Experience has shown that School Improvement Councils become teams and develop a shared sense of mission when they take time to engage in the following steps:

- Orient the members to the school and the council.
- Clarify the role and responsibility of the council.
- Develop operating guidelines for making decisions.
- Assign tasks to each member of the council.

### **Orienting Members**

It is important that all council members have a good working knowledge of the school in order to be able to make good decisions that will improve it. While some teachers, parents, and students may be familiar with a broad spectrum of school information, it cannot be expected that all members will have the same knowledge base. Taking the time to update and inform all members about the school will enable them to be equal partners in their council deliberations. Secondary school council orientation sessions might include:

- Oral and written presentations by department heads, school staff, and central office administrators
- Distribution of school documents (budget, handbooks, policies, etc.)
- Informational visits to councils in other communities
- Workshops on group process that may be offered by school staff or consultants from universities or community organizations
- Discussion of the roles of the council and other school groups, such as the faculty senate, parent-teacher organization, student government, etc.
- Information about national, state, or local associations which relate to councils
- Information about Chapter 188 legislation

### **Clarifying the Role of the Council**

Group cohesiveness can be increased if members understand their individual roles as representatives of school and community constituencies and the relationship of their council to other governing/advisory bodies in the school

and the school system. Members may want to "brainstorm" their expectations regarding the role of the council, share the impressions and information they have gathered, and develop a public statement about the council's responsibilities.

### **Creating Operating Guidelines**

Councils operate more smoothly if members develop operating guidelines which inform council members and the community about the council's purpose, structure, and procedures. These guidelines should be periodically reviewed and made available to the public and new members. Council guidelines may include the following:

- Purpose or mission statement
- Membership list
- Meeting times
- Names of sub-committees and their chairs
- Meeting policies (frequency and quorums)
- Decision-making procedures

### **Assigning Tasks**

A team values and uses each of its members' special skills and perspectives. "Homework" assignments which draw on council members' special interests and expertise give each member a sense of ownership for the council and its work. Council members' reports on their assignments can expedite the work that is done during council meetings and create the opportunity for each member to make a specific contribution.

### **What process should the council use to make decisions?**

School Improvement Councils throughout the state have used both majority votes and the consensus approach for decision-making. Those who used the majority vote method reported that their votes were most often unanimous. Many of these councils recommend the use of the consensus approach which provides the same voting outcome and builds council cohesion by reinforcing the value of each individual member's viewpoint. The consensus approach, through its process of asking for all members' opinions, encourages the council to air and discuss the many issues that may be influencing a decision.

Councils should discuss and identify a decision-making approach that is most comfortable for the group. If the group decides on a consensus decision-making method, it should remember that consensus is a way of working together that does not necessarily mean unanimity of agreement. Group members can disagree or be uncomfortable with a decision of the group and still be willing to go along with it. At the heart of the consensus process is the importance of each group member's viewpoint and the expression of these views to the whole

group. It is perfectly acceptable for a member to say, "I disagree with this decision; I've told everyone how I feel and the group has listened. However, I'm willing to support the decision in order to try it out." The hallmarks of a consensus method are that:

- Council meetings are viewed as problem-solving sessions and not as competitive, win-or-lose events.
- All members have a chance to state their views.
- Periodic "straw polls" are taken to identify the common ground among divergent viewpoints.
- All members are willing to support the majority decision.

## V. MAXIMIZING THE IMPACT OF THE COUNCIL'S SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT GRANT

### On what should the School Improvement Council grant be spent?

The School Improvement Council legislation provides broad categories, such as academic and cultural enrichment, community and parental involvement programs, alternative education and other services for students, and staff training to describe the ways in which school improvement grants may be used. Councils are given a great deal of latitude in defining these categories and are encouraged to determine the best use of their grant through assessing the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of their individual schools.

A few councils have concentrated their grant on one large project, such as a reading incentive project or a science enrichment program. Most councils at the secondary level have funded a range of varied projects in order to spread the benefits of their grants among their diverse student population and the different interest groups at the school.

### What methods have councils used to set their spending priorities?

Following an assessment of the school's needs, many secondary School Improvement Councils have asked for "Requests for Programs" that will enrich the school. These proposals are then reviewed according to several criteria. In evaluating and ranking the proposals, councils generally seek to ascertain:

- What needs are being met?
- Will the program have immediate benefits to students?
- How many students will be served?
- What will be the long range impact of the proposed program?

### How can the council maximize the long range impact of its spending decisions?

Councils can and do have different philosophies about the uses of their grant. Many councils respond to immediate short term needs and fund several specific programs that address glaring problems or inequities in the school. Many other councils become involved in long term planning efforts at the school. In these instances councils match their spending decisions with their planning goals.

In some communities, other committees and decision-making groups at the school develop multi-year school improvement plans which identify annual goals. These goals become part of the data that councils at these schools use to determine their spending decisions.

Schools which develop long term plans with annual goals are using the following approaches to coordinate school planning efforts with the work of the School Improvement Council:

- Organizing the School Improvement Council as an umbrella organization that coordinates with other school organizations to develop goals and plans for the school.
- Organizing the School Improvement Council as a subcommittee of a larger, representative school council which develops school goals and plans for the school.
- Holding annual "Town-Meeting" convocations of all interested staff, parents, students, and community members in order to set the school's goals and priorities for the next year. These meetings help set the priorities for the School Improvement Council and, in some communities, have been used to elect the following year's parent members on the council.

**How can school improvement councils, which are elected/appointed annually, engage in long-range planning?**

The legislation requires annual elections/appointments for one year terms on School Improvement Councils. However, council members are able to stand for re-election/re-appointment and serve for more than one year. In many communities, council members have run for re-election so that they can bring their experience to a second year of council deliberations or stay involved to oversee the completion of multi-year projects initiated with council funds. Other ways to promote continuity and a long term perspective on councils include:

- Holding council elections in the spring so that newly elected members can sit in on the last meeting of the current year's council.
- Encourage newly organized councils to evaluate the impact of the previous School Improvement Councils' expenditures as one of their first responsibilities in the new school year.

**How can councils ensure that all departments and areas of the school benefit from the grant?**

Many secondary School Improvement Councils adopt a policy that "School Improvement Fund grants should benefit all students in the school." This policy requires the council to ensure an equitable distribution of benefits to all departments, programs, and students at the school. Secondary councils have met this equity challenge with a range of strategies:

- Earmarking portions of the grant for different grade levels, programs, departments, etc. before considering and making any other spending decisions.

- Establishing categories, that correlate with grades or divisions of the school, under which "requests-for programs" will be judged
- Allotting a percentage of the grant to an "all school" project (e.g., installing a salad bar in the cafeteria, providing all school cultural assembly programs).

#### **How can councils stretch the impact of their school improvement grant?**

Many councils have used portions of their grant for "seed money" to encourage, for example, business or community groups to provide matching or supplementary funds for special programs. At the secondary school level this approach has enabled schools to expand the impact of their funds as they made purchases of high-technology equipment, presented cultural programs, and mounted substance abuse prevention programs whose costs exceeded the amount of the councils' grant. Councils have identified and accessed these additional funds in several ways:

- Sending community needs assessment surveys to businesses, community service groups, and local service agency and cultural institutions.
- Asking for information on potential resources in the community.
- Asking PTA's/PTO's, booster clubs, and community service organizations what school or education-related projects they might like to pursue with a matching contribution from the council.



## VI. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT COUNCILS AND SCHOOL COMMITTEES

**What is the relationship of the School Improvement Councils to the school committee?**

The legislation establishes three roles for the local school committee in relationship to the School Improvement Council.

- School committees appoint the community representative to the council.
- School committees appoint the three parent representatives to the council if there is no parent-teacher organization at the school to conduct the election of parent representatives.
- School committees are given the responsibility of approving or disapproving councils' expenditure requests.
  - School committees approve councils' expenditures by a majority vote.
  - If the school committee takes no action on a council's spending proposal within 30 calendar days of its submission, the proposal is assumed to be approved.
  - Uses of the grant monies that receive a veto may not be proposed to the school committee for one calendar year.
  - School committees do not need to approve or disapprove on entire spending "package." They may review individually each item on a council's request list.

**How have School Improvement Councils and school committees worked cooperatively together?**

Experience with School Improvement Councils across the state has shown that frequent and regular communication between School Improvement Councils and school committees facilitates approval of Councils' expenditure proposals. School committees have developed a range of practices that enhance council and school committee interaction.

### School Committee Guidelines

School committees have provided councils with background and updates on the programs and services that are going to be included in the regular district budget so that the council will not use its funds for items that would be already included in the school budget. School committees have also informed School Improvement Councils about system-wide school improvement priorities, allowing councils to exercise their discretion on implementing these priorities in their building.

Some school committees have written guidelines to assist councils as they make their expenditure decisions. These guidelines, which relate to the process and not the outcome of decision-making, have helped councils to match their spending priorities with their needs and to evaluate the impact of their spending decisions. The guidelines usually suggest that councils develop the following information to support their spending proposals.

- A description of need based on a description of what conditions are desired and what conditions exist at the school.
- A statement of how the proposed expenditure will:
  - fill that need
  - relate to the instructional program and the curriculum
  - benefit students
- A description of how the School Improvement Councils will know that the expenditure will achieve its intended results.

### **System-wide Orientation Meetings**

Many systems have convened summit level meetings with the school committee and newly organized School Improvement Councils at which information is shared about the committee's goals for the coming year. These meetings also allow councils to share information on effective practices and programs and, on occasion, to consider pooling their funds for joint purchases of equipment or for enrichment programs for their schools.

### **Information Sharing**

School Improvement Councils, on their part, have initiated communication and interaction with school committees for several purposes:

- To share their decision-making timelines with the school committee.
- To share the results of their needs assessment and the results of their community surveys with the school committee.
- To provide their school committee with advance copies of "request for program" applications which outline the councils' decision-making priorities and processes.
- To invite school committee members to meetings of the council and to community hearings and forums.

## **What are the benefits of closer cooperation between school committees and School Improvement Councils?**

School Improvement Councils have found that communication and collaboration with school committees can provide many benefits for their schools and for education in the community.

### **Benefits to Councils**

Keeping school committees informed of the council's needs assessment and decision-making process increases the likelihood that councils will have their expenditure requests approved.

Sharing information about school needs gathered through the councils' school and community surveys:

- Provides school committees with needed information that can help their planning and decision-making.
- Increases the likelihood that projects initiated by councils may become "mainstreamed" into the regular school budget.
- Increases councils' prospects of discovering other existing sources of funds at the district level that can address school needs, leaving councils' funds for other programs.

### **Benefits to School Committees**

School committees have found that the talent and energy of council members is a valuable resource that can be tapped when there is a need to form task forces and other school-community committees. Many councils have continued to meet after their spending proposals have been approved to assess their impact and to assist school committees. School Improvement Councils are working on research projects for their school committees by:

- Holding community hearings on revisions in a school policy handbook.
- Analyzing the results of school climate surveys.
- Reviewing basic skills and curriculum assessment data.
- Helping in the review of other Chapter 188 related grant proposals such as instructional materials and technology grants.



APPENDIX A

AN ACT IMPROVING THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF THE COMMONWEALTH

CHAPTER 188 OF THE ACTS OF 1985

AS AMENDED BY CHAPTER 414 OF THE ACTS OF 1986

**SECTION 2.** Chapter 10 of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after section 35E the following section:

**Section 35F.** There shall be established and set up on the books of the Commonwealth a separate fund, to be known as the School Improvement Fund, to improve the quality of education at the school building level. Said fund shall consist of all monies appropriated therefor in each fiscal year and shall be allocated and expended pursuant to the provisions of section fifty-one of chapter fifteen. Notwithstanding the provisions of section nine B of chapter twenty-nine, all monies appropriated to said fund shall be made available for distribution upon appropriation.

**Section 51.** The board shall allocate such funds as are appropriated to the School Improvement Fund, established under the provisions of section thirty-five F of chapter ten, to each school building containing any of the grades from kindergarten to six, inclusive, in the fiscal year nineteen hundred and eighty-six, and in every school building containing any of the grades from kindergarten to twelve, inclusive, in the fiscal year nineteen hundred and eighty-seven and each fiscal year thereafter, which has filed information set forth in section forty-nine of chapter fifteen in the following manner: an amount of money equal to the total number of full-time equivalent students in grades kindergarten to six, or kindergarten to twelve in attendance there during the preceding school year multiplied by ten dollars in the fiscal year nineteen hundred and eighty-six and each fiscal year thereafter.

Funds appropriated by the board shall be deposited with the town, city or regional treasurer in a separate account for expenditure by the councils pursuant to this section.

The proceeds of the fund shall be used, at the school building level, to establish innovative academic programs, expanded services to students, purchase of instructional equipment, alternative education programs, cultural education programs, community or parental involvement programs, business and education partnership programs, staff training, or for any other purposes consistent with the intent of this section.

Such funds shall not be used for current operating costs, supplies, utilities, existing building and equipment maintenance, existing staff salaries and wages, consistent with the intent of this section.

**Section 51 of chapter 15 of the General Laws, as appearing in section 6 of chapter 188 of the acts of 1985, is hereby amended by striking out the fifth paragraph and inserting in place thereof the following paragraph:**

At each school the expenditure of said funds shall be determined exclusively by a council consisting of the school principal who shall serve as chairman; and for the first two thousand five hundred students or part thereof, three teachers, elected annually by the teachers of the building, three parents

of children attending said school building chosen in elections held annually by the local parent-teacher organization under the direction of the principal of such school or, if none exists chosen by the school committee; one person appointed by the school committee; and, for school buildings containing any of the grades nine to twelve, inclusive, one male secondary student and one female secondary student attending said school building elected annually by the students of said grades. For schools with more than two thousand five hundred students there shall be one teacher, one parent, and, at school buildings containing any of the grades nine to twelve, one secondary student representative for each additional five hundred students selected in the manner above to serve on the council.

To the extent possible said councils shall be broadly representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of the school building and community.

All decisions of the local school improvement council regarding the expenditure of funds under this section shall be submitted to the school committee who may veto same by a majority recorded vote. If no such vote is rendered by the committee within thirty days of receipt of said decision, it shall be assumed to be approved. Should the school committee veto a decision of the local school improvement council, said matter shall not be re-submitted for a period of one year from said veto. Decisions of the local school improvement council shall not be subject to chapter one hundred and fifty E, provided, however, that such expenditures or decisions of said councils shall not be in violation of local collective bargaining contracts in existence at the time of passage of this act; and provided, however, that decisions of the local school improvement council regarding matters brought before it, including, but not limited to the expenditure of funds under this section, shall not interfere with any power, authority, or statutory obligation lawfully vested in any school committee.

All members of the school improvement council shall be subject to the provisions of chapter two hundred and sixty-eight A and shall not be subject to the provisions of chapter two hundred and sixty-eight B. The operation of the councils shall be subject to the provisions of section eleven A, one-half of chapter thirty A, sections thirty-five to forty-six A, inclusive, of chapter forty-four and section ten of chapter sixty-six.

The council shall annually submit a complete and detailed report of expenditures of funds under this section to the commissioner of education by the end of the school year.

The department shall prepare and distribute to each school superintendent and school improvement council a report specifying the use of school improvement funds statewide.

## APPENDIX B

### MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL LAWS

Statutes referred to in G.L.C. 15, S51, as added by  
Section 6 of Chapter 188 of the Acts of 1985

### SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT COUNCILS

Council members are not subject to:

**Chapter 150E - Labor Relations: Public Employees**

which governs collective bargaining rights of public employees including such areas as collective bargaining agreements, grievance, arbitration, mediation, strikes, complaints

**Chapter 268B - Financial Disclosure by Certain Public Officials and Employees**

which governs disclosure of financial interests by public employees with the State Ethics Commission

Council members are subject to:

**Chapter 268A - Conduct of Public Officials and Employees**

which governs the conduct of all public employees, regardless of whether or not they receive compensation, and prohibits various types of conflict of interest

**Chapter 30A, Section 11A $\frac{1}{2}$  - Open Meeting Law**

All meetings of any governmental body must be open to the public and any person shall be permitted to attend. No executive session may be held unless the group has first met in an open session and executive session may only be held to discuss particular subjects listed in the statute.

A notice of the meeting, with the time, date and location indicated, must be posted with the clerk of the city or town at least 48 hours in advance, including Saturdays but not Sundays and legal holidays. This posting is the responsibility of the officer calling the meeting.

A governmental body must keep accurate records of its meetings including the date, time, place, members present and absent, and action taken, including in executive session. These records shall be available to the public.

Meetings may be tape recorded by anyone in attendance as long as it is not disruptive to the meeting.

All appointed or elected members of a governmental body shall receive a section of this law for their signature.

Council members are subject to:

**Chapter 44, Sections 35 - 46A - Towns and Districts, Cities - Audit Requirements** which governs the procedures and requirements for audits of financial records of cities and towns. The School Improvement Councils will be subject to the same auditing procedures as other governmental bodies.

**Chapter 66, Section 10 - Public Inspection of Records; Fees for Copies**

Public records may be inspected and a copy made, upon the payment of a reasonable fee.

## APPENDIX C

### SECONDARY SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT COUNCIL CONFERENCE

#### LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

##### BLACKSTONE-MILLVILLE REGIONAL JUNIOR-SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Superintendent: Thomas J. Cullen  
Principal and Chair: Robert Power  
Community Representative: Gail Bryson  
Teachers: Priscilla Dauphinee  
Mary McCormack  
Edwin Parker  
Parents: Ann Marie Chevrette  
Richare Burgoyne  
Richard Robeau  
Students: Christine Gray  
Patrick McLaughlin

##### BROCKTON HIGH SCHOOL

District Office Contact: Eligijus Suziedelis, Coordinator Special Projects  
Principal and Chair: Robert Reagan  
Other District Office Staff: John Boutin, Administrative Intern  
Susan Dukess, Special Projects  
Department Head: Paul Casey, Reading Department  
Union Representative: Robert Cattabriga  
Teachers: George McDonough  
Frederick Hodnett  
Michael Sullivan  
Deborah Murphy-Tuck  
Parents: Paul Keefe  
Jeanne Noone  
Virginia Noone  
Agnes Peckham  
Nancy Sneider  
Students: Bradford Leighton  
Amy Lipman  
Nancy Lurie  
Elisa Shuman  
Annemarie White

**FALL RIVER**  
**B.M.C. Durfee High School**

Superintendent: John R. Correiro  
Principal and Chair: James Panos  
Department Head: Stephan Uchman, Vocational Education Director  
Community Representative: Edward J. Sullivan  
Teachers: Manuel Goncalves  
Cassandra Fitzgerald  
John Madeiros  
James Wilcox  
Students: Stacy Hubbard  
Helen Kuhn  
Barry McDonald  
Parents: Claire Plante  
Earl White

**GREENFIELD HIGH SCHOOL**

Superintendent: John E. O'Brien  
Principal and Chair: Edward W. Jones  
Teachers: William Beauregard  
Thomas DeRose  
Marilyn Williams  
Parents: Imelda East  
Mary MacLeod  
Rosemary Siano  
Students: Kia Brokos  
Daniel Graves

**HAMPDEN-WILBRAHAM**  
**Minnechaug Regional High School**

Superintendent: Brian Halloran  
Principal and Chair: Jerry A. Badger  
Community Representative: Sherwood Cronk  
Teachers: David Bernstein  
Mary Lou Brewer  
Janet King

**Parents:** Elaine Robinson  
Joanne Sheehan

**Students:** Maureen Trombly  
Regina Alberici  
Jeffrey Collins

**HOLYOKE**  
**Deane Vocational High School**

**Superintendent:** George Counter

**Principal and Chair:** Walter Welch

**District Office:** Lora Barret, Parent Information Center  
Angel Naeto, Parent Information Center

**Community Representative:** Louis Silver

**Teachers:** Robert Ferro  
Edgar Rodriguez  
Harry Santiago

**Parents:** Elsie Bouchard  
James Cartwright  
Robert Daysh

**Students:** Paul Bouchard  
Evelyn Rivera

**NEEDHAM HIGH SCHOOL**

**Superintendent:** Frederick J. Tirrell

**Principal and Chair:** Edwin P. Fredie

**Department Head:** Mildred Beane

**Union Representative:** Jean McDonald

**Community Representative:** John Ryan

**Teachers:** Arnold Armquist  
Roy Johan  
Sally Kaczmarek

**Parents:** Chris Buscemi  
Susan Hansen  
Jane Howard

**Students:** David Benson  
Andres Goldman  
Alexandria Lee  
Margaret Miles

**NEWBURYPORT HIGH SCHOOL**

Superintendent: Frank Bresnahan  
Principal and Chair: J. Emmett Goggin  
Community Representative: William Sullivan  
Teachers: Jane Collins  
Edward Joyce  
Susan Stone  
Parents: Thomas Champion  
Nancy Polick  
Cynthia Randall  
Students: Christopher Cooney  
Nancy Lima

**QUINCY**

**North Quincy High School**

District Office Contact: Richard K. Crystal, Assistant Superintendent  
Principal and Chair: Peter J. Chrisom  
Community Representative: Elaine McGrail  
Teachers: David Burke  
Michael Hurley  
Parents: Ann Desroche  
Barbara Guilfoy  
Florence Steeves  
Students: Patricia Koski  
Eugene Yee

**APPENDIX D**  
**LIST OF FIELD-REVIEWERS**

Gina Alberici Student Minnechaug Regional High School Wilbraham	Edward W. Jones Principal Greenfield High School Greenfield
Lora Barrett Parent Coordinator Holyoke Public Schools	Joyce McDonough Teacher Brockton High School Brockton
Dave Burke Teacher North Quincy High School Quincy	James Panos Principal B.M.C. Durfee High School Fall River
Thomas J. Cullen Superintendent Blackstone-Millville Regional School District Blackstone	Cynthia Randall Parent Newburyport High School Newburyport
Edwin P. Freddie Principal Needham High School Needham	Robert Reagan Principal Brockton High School Brockton
Manuel Goncalves Teacher B.M.C. Durfee High School Fall River	Maureen Trombly Parent Minnechaug Regional High School Wilbraham
Dan Graves Student Greenfield High School Greenfield	Marilyn Williams Teacher Greenfield High School Greenfield
Michael Hurley Teacher North Quincy High School Quincy	

## HELP FOR COUNCILS

The Department of Education's Community Education Office, in collaboration with the Regional Education Centers, will continue to offer a variety of services, conferences, and publications for School Improvement Councils. Councils are encouraged to make use of the following resources:

Regional Contact People, located in the Department's Regional Education Centers, are experienced in helping School Improvement Councils succeed. They are rich resources and skilled referral agents for councils. For more information about Department services, call the contact person at your Regional Center, as listed on the inside of the back cover of this booklet.

The Community Education Office has produced several publications which have proven valuable to councils. Among them are School Improvement Councils: Questions and Answers #2, (revised October, 1986) which addresses some of the common concerns raised by School Improvement Councils and explains the 1986 amendment to Chapter 188. It has been sent to all principals, superintendents, and school committee chairpersons. Additional copies are available at your Regional Center or from the Department's Community Education Office in Quincy.

The publication Developing an Effective School Improvement Council (revised November 1986) provides councils with helpful hints and strategies for increasing their effectiveness including sample needs assessments, survey forms, and meeting checklists. This booklet has also been sent to principals, superintendents, and school committee chairpersons.

A Speakers Bureau has been established to provide councils with experienced speakers who are available to make presentations on School Improvement Councils and their potential for education. Call your Regional Contact Person for further information.

The Statewide Resource Network is composed of organizations and individuals experienced in working with councils. These specialists are available to consult with individual school systems or councils at their site on particular areas of concern or difficulty. Call your Regional Contact Person for information on this service and for referral to a member of the Network.

**MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
REGIONAL EDUCATION CENTER CONTACT PEOPLE  
FOR SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT COUNCILS**

**Central Massachusetts Regional Education Center**

Chuck Radio, Lynne Simonds, or Tim Wilson  
Route 140, Beaman Street  
West Boylston, MA 01583  
(617) 835-6266

**Greater Boston Regional Education Center**

Ed Glasser or Mamie Jones  
75 Acton Street  
Arlington, MA 02174  
(617) 641-4870

**Greater Springfield Regional Education Center**

Pat Cote  
88 Massasoit Avenue  
West Springfield, MA 01089  
(413) 739-7271

**Northeast Regional Education Center**

Nancy Dube or Amy Sosman  
219 North Street  
North Reading, MA 01846  
(617) 664-5723

**Northwest Regional Education Center**

Ron Areglado  
Mark Hopkins Hall  
Church Street  
North Adams, MA 01247  
(413) 664-4511

**Southeast Regional Education Center**

John Geovanis  
Lakeville State Hospital  
P.O. Box 29  
Middleboro, MA 02346  
(617) 947-1231

